

# The Cycles of Inquiry Model: An Exploration of Action Research through Movement and Vocalization

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## Recommended Citation

Kong, Luis (2013). "The Cycles of Inquiry Model: An Exploration of Action Research through Movement and Vocalization," *Adult Education Research Conference*. <http://newprairiepress.org/aerc/2013/papers/27>

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# **The Cycles of Inquiry Model: An Exploration of Action Research through Movement and Vocalization**

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**Abstract:** The Cycles of Inquiry Model is grounded in somatic, embodied learning and vocalization. Tenshingoso, a Japanese expressive arts practice, is used as a platform for inquiry and dialogue that stimulates the senses and imagination to construct a container from which to enrich recursive knowledge and reflection. This somatic based framework provides a transformative and creative process for adult education practitioners.

## **Introduction**

Somatic learning in adult education provides a cyclical framework for learning and reflection, and it serves as a deep well into learning and knowing in adult education. The movement experience provides an organic and non-rational way to tap into the body and mind's wisdom to engage in investigation and to envision the inquiry process in a unique and expressive way. The transformative and creative learning process using body movement and vocalization can stimulate the embodiment of action research by adult practitioners and add to the few research models based on embodied learning.

Movement exploration can generate new meanings through the uses of metaphor and imagery that can mobilize our senses and make space for intellectual exploration. We can tell stories and create positive images therefore constructing an expanded sense of self and the world through a repertoire of body movement and posture. This process translates into a way of being in the world that enhances relationships with others and with nature, and encourages fluidity and reflection in a way that cannot be attained through intellectual process alone (Lawrence, 2005).

Alternative ways of learning and imagining enriches the way we view the world around us. Shintaido, an expressive martial art, provides a rich source of metaphors and positive images that serve as the foundational movements for the Cycle of Inquiry Model I am introducing in this paper. There are other models of research that begin with movement and experiential practices. One of those community based research models is the late Augusto Boal's *Theater of the Oppressed* where community research in the form of community stories arise from the shapes and sounds that participants create with their bodies. Participants co-create a narrative starting from snapshots of story fragments to the development of full scripts that reveal a community's challenges, power relations, and offer a schema for possible solutions. The cumulative effect of the movement experiments and voices construct a social reality that mirrors the stories of the participants. Those socially constructed stories based on movement are then retold in a theatrical presentation to a community with an ensuing dialogue about its meaning and consequences.

The Cycle of Inquiry Model also begins with movement and engages the practitioner by starting with an interior dialogue about self and identity and expanding the text or movement to encompass a community dialogue that embraces an embodied community of knowledge. The Cycle of Inquiry movements encompass distinct phases of inquiry that are based on my own experience with movement, modern dance, mime, Boal's work, martial arts, and with conducting action research individually and with community groups.

The act of opening and liberating multiple ways of learning and engaging in the exploration of knowledge through body movement, ventures beyond our limits in the way we chose to learn and the way we chose to act as engaged citizens and adult learners. According to Lawrence, “the opening up of intellectual expression is possible by incorporating “other ways of knowing into our teaching practice, as expressed through metaphor, dance, poetry, visual art, or dramatic expression, we draw on the effective, somatic, and spiritual domains”(2005, p. 4).

Alternative forms of expression, in addition to cognitive modes, provide opportunities to expand the learner’s intellectual curiosity and focus by harvesting the metaphors and images that creative activity can inspire. Shintaido practitioners showed a keen ability to transfer their somatic awareness to daily life situations. They were able to use imagery and metaphor as key elements of affirmative competence that integrated their personal values with the principles of their martial arts practice resulting in positive actions or choices in their communities and at their workplace. McHugh described body movement as an opportunity to “explore and increase your range of choices for feeling, perceiving, thinking and sensing as you move from self-consciousness to self-awareness” (2005, p. 1).

### **Exploring A Movement Model for Research**

I have found that the cyclical Shintaido practice called *Tenshingosō* can be utilized as a platform for constructing a process of inquiry for a research study or in developing projects geared for personal or organizational change. It is a process similar to action research. *Tenshingosō*, a core Shintaido martial arts movement that means the five heavenly movements, provided a foundation to interpreting each stage of the five distinct phases of the Cycles of Inquiry design I’ve created.

This basic *Tenshingosō* movement served as a container for creating meaning in the same way a text requires the infusion of experiences by the reader and his or her imagination in order to come alive. Shintaido practitioners use somatic learning as a way to inquire about themselves and those around them. They use the movement process as a vessel for learning. Movement can be a container from which meaning can grow through embodied learning. Movement doesn’t supplant research, but serves as a body centered framework to expand a cognitive and intellectual space needed for research.

The five *Tenshingosō* movements and vocal sound associations, A, E, I, O and Um, can be used as stages for inquiry. These movements are seed phases in a research process with each phase representing a cycle that builds upon the previous phase. By repeating and improving on these basic movement phases, the practitioner can harvest imagery and metaphors, perhaps guiding sensations, that can support and expand his or her research process.

*Tenshingosō* is a flowing movement made with the arms that starts in a meditative pose with hands gently clasped in front of the body. The hands and arms open wide with fingers fanning out. Arms reach behind and rise above the head pointing to the sky or *ten*. Then, the hands “slice the sky” while coming down to waist level. The hands and arms push forward and reach out over the horizon. They circle above the head towards the back and with palms facing down the arms move forward reaching the horizon again. The hands return to the meditative position where they started at the beginning. According to David Franklin, a senior Shintaido instructor, *Tenshingosō* is translated as follows: the word *ten* in Chinese translates as “heaven.” The word “heaven” is circular in nature and means “what is above with a neutral idea of implied universal order” (2001, p. 9). He explains that truth is represented

by *shin*, and *go* means five, and finally *so* translates as expression. The cyclical nature of the movement represents in non-verbal terms the five expressions (Goso) of universal truth (Tenshin).

### The Cycles of Inquiry Model

The Cycles of Inquiry consists of five phases: **Origin, Conception, Learning, Knowing and Doing**. I've connected each *Tenshingos* movement phase and sound with a research stage, for example the sound of *Um* with Origin and *A* with Conception. I used the *Tenshingos* movements as a metaphor to help me conceptualize each phase of this research process.

#### *UM - Origin:*

Every person sees reality with his or her particular lens; there is no such thing as a neutral observer. I begin to sort my origin (i.e., race, class, culture, life experiences) by settling into my place of stillness or *UM*, focusing on the self with questions such as – Who am I? What is my story? What are my significant memories? How do those remembrances influence my life today? This stage is about going back to the source. Origin is a place of discovery of the self. The researcher stands with her right hand folded over the left hand, eyes closed breathing out with *UM* sound.

The exploration of origin provides a chance to settle kinesthetically into a physiological meditative zone to dwell on the I, to observe our story unfold, and to de-center the self. Perhaps move to the margin and look in.

Identity, in particular racial identity, is not static. According to Omi and Winant (1996), the concept of racial identity is a social-historical constructed process “by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed” (p. 55). Identity is in constant flux. It is influenced by where we are, who we are with and by a larger social dynamic battling for a place in history. The *Um* stage provides us with a micro environment to reflect on our identity as adult practitioners, and, in Shintaido terms, find nothingness.

#### *A - Conception:*

Conception is about pursuing one's dreams and asking sustaining, disruptive and integrative questions. The reality people create is preceded by the questions asked. I experienced the *A* in *Tenshingos* as a creative opening and a chance to envision my dream for this research. What questions do I need to ask? By reaching behind me with open palms and by trusting into my past experiences and knowledge, I look upwards into the creative heaven for inspiration on ways to explore the world. Hands unfold and open to the side and back in one expansive movement. Conception is a time to give shape to inquiry by expanding on ideas.

According to Augusto Boal, ideas are an expression of reality. He calls ideas the “dynamic principle of matter” (1985, p.7). Conception, or the idea of the research process, is a show that reflects reality but is not reality. In the conception stage of the Cycles of Inquiry, a search of a form is taking place, and the vowel *A* helps us gather the elements necessary to envision our image of what we are looking for. The creative opening in the movement opens the chest cavity, allows air to flow into our lungs and with arms wide open circles from front to back and up into the sky scooping the literature of the world as the researcher pursues her research questions. This stage is the most expressive movement in the Cycle of Inquiry because it bridges the centering *OM* sound with an explosive *A* that opens space for

discovery formally as in Eiko Sei style, or big or free as in Aiko Dai style in Shintaido (Aoki, 1992, p. 74).

### *E - Learning:*

In research, this step comes about in the form of interviews, conversations, focus groups, observations, field notes and publications. I am reaching out and exploring the world by using the research design created in the conception phase. The participants are learning about my purpose and intention in pursuing research and in turn, I am learning about them. This is a significant phase where relationship plays an important role. Hands reach toward the sky and the edge of the hands cut the sky in front in a curved motion.

The learning stage is described in *Tenshingosō* as cutting into the sky. Hiroyui Aoki, the founder of Shintaido, calls this stage “seeking your fortune and sharing what you have been given with others” (1992, p. 76). From a non-western perspective, the relationship that the researcher creates with participants is something given to her that in turn is shared with others who learn from her discoveries to stimulate change.

In Eastern philosophy, the concept of Ten-Chi-Jin centralizes holistic wisdom in the body by creating “an openness in relationships and a sense of giving and receiving when interacting with people and nature” (Kong, 2009, p. 192). This dialogic interaction enhances our understanding of participants, of the literature, of observations and interviews. The interaction of texts, utterances and conversations provide meaning to the voices we conjure in research, and provide a contextual framework where each voice or text enhances the other (Kong, 2013).

In the learning or *E* stage, the *Tenshingosō* embodied metaphor connects the learner as a swordperson cutting the heaven to go deeper into the truth (Franklin, 2001).

### *I – Knowing:*

After I reach out and explore the world by asking questions, engaging in inquiry, and connecting outward, I bring back that information for evaluation and reflection. In a matter of speaking, I reach out in “*T*” to expand and enrich my interpretation of what I have learned. This type of initiative and collective knowledge helps me regain a connection with reality, and was repeated several times in my research until I was satisfied with my findings. The cycle of “*E*” and “*T*” can repeat as many times as it is needed to gain a deeper understanding of what has been inquired about and to begin to design a course for leadership and action. Elbows bend and move back. The fingers are wide open. The hands push forward towards the horizon.

This stage allows to actively reflect on our findings. It allows us to investigate the research process and its implications. It may be useful to cycle back to the Origin or Conception stage to find another way to knowing by reframing questions. How and in what ways are my research tools helping bring cohesion to my research, and what is being left out? Our own views and life experiences have an impact on how we see the world. In many cases, our life experiences taints the process and can perpetuate ideologies as much as it can question them. Dian Marino (1997) warns us about reproducing hegemony in adult education by trusting our thinking about the ways we view our external reality. She writes, “In North America, immersed as we are in a mass-mediated culture, learning of a deep and continuous nature is occurring daily for most if not all of us; and some of this learning –

patterns of interpretation and practices of cultural production, especially – becomes an impediment to education for social transformation, and we sometimes unintentionally reproduce it in the process of constructing alternative or popular education materials” (p. 104). In *Knowing*, we are reviewing our own actions by reflecting on how we interpret what we find, and what we are perpetuating or eliminating from the research.

This stage serves as a platform to ask questions. It is a process by which we take what we have found and dig for the truth. Researchers are influenced by hegemony both by its subtle persuasion in as much as its interpretative quiescence (Marino, 1997). Researchers are constantly constructing knowledge by interpreting previous knowledge production. The researcher can engage in discovery by reframing knowledge through conversation and by challenging through reflective practice the power relations between self and participants (Marino, 1997).

In this embodied movement process, the researcher is engaged in a dialogic discourse with herself and with her surroundings. What she expresses is intertwined with other voices and other movements or utterances. The *Knowledge* stage is disruptive because it attempts to question the order of our thinking, and transform our pre-determined ideas about outcomes. *Knowledge* allows us to pause and look and listen with others and become co-creators of history (Kong, 2013).

#### *O – Doing:*

This research phase unifies what has been learned from critical reflection and dialogue on the themes and topics of the findings, and brings them back to creative action. In *Tenshingoso*, I reach up with *O* embracing all that I know and then acting on that knowledge to make an impact on the world by giving back to it. This is a circular process that touches on all previous phases. I am using what I know to make an impact in society through social and organizational change. *Doing* is about realizing a destiny through leadership in action that brings about change. The hands make a circular motion from the front towards the back and sides of the body. Finally pointing forward with fingers wide open and with palms facing forward. Hands return to the starting *UM* position.

The final stage of *Doing* in the Cycle of Inquiry completes the *kata* or form. Hiroyuki Aoki describes the *Tenshingoso* movement as a symbol of unity between mind and spirit (*kokoro*) that embodies a core of human values and attributes accessible to everyone (1992). He writes,

“ Although this *kata*, as a synthesis of martial arts technique, was created for largely pragmatic reasons, as an embodiment and expression of the common *tao* of many different disciplines, it stimulates the cycle of human life and even the rhythm of the cosmos. It moves from: nothingness, through birth, and awakening, growth, trust and openness, adoration and expression, coherence and consolidation, exploration, control and responsibility, justice and discipline, hope and aspiration, fruition, forgiveness and acceptance, offering and blessing, and returns to the original state of nothingness” (1992, p. 45).

Aoki’s “*tao* of many different disciplines” is the distillation of the essential teachings and practices that he learned from theater, dance, martial arts, shiatsu, massage and mediation (1992). The integration of values and embodied practice grew from essential elements that can be used as a guide in conducting action research through a reflective exploration of movement and vocalization.

## Conclusion

Somatic learning and action research are natural allies in the pursuit of continuous inquiry, in the process of creative discovery, and in the exploration of the unknown (Kong, 2009). There are many ways to approach learning and in the way we imagine the exterior and interior landscape we live in. The exploration of alternative ways of knowing, learning and engaging in inquiry are necessary for our survival as human beings (Kong, 2009; Nieves, 2012). As adult educators, we must explore those alternative spaces, experience them through our bodies and voices. Furthermore, we must engage in a constructive and recursive dialogue to extract meaning from our kinesthetic knowledge and from the metaphors that arise from that knowledge. Somatic learning may not be able to solve mathematical problems, but it can inspire us to reach in a different mode to regenerate an affirmative competence that can enrich and shape our inquiry, decolonizing our imagination to build a better world.

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